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MONTANA'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE LOWEST IN NATION

(HELENA) - Montana's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate declined for the third consecutive month to 2.0%.

"The state now has the lowest unemployment rate in the nation and is well below the national average of 4.4%," said Governor Brian Schweitzer.

Unemployment rates for other regional states showed North Dakota at 3.1%, South Dakota at 3.1%, Wyoming at 2.6%, and Idaho at 2.8%.

The low unemployment rate may be a contributor to the recent decline of participants requesting cash assistance and family Medicaid. "Although the decrease in enrollment is encouraging, many working families are still struggling for basic necessities due to low wages," said Director Joan Miles of the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

"It's imperative that as Montana attracts new businesses we continue to encourage wage growth," said Labor Commissioner Keith Kelly. "The low unemployment rate should help this effort by exerting upward pressure on wages."

The consumer price index increased 0.6% between February and March, following a 0.4% increase the previous month. The increase was again driven by fuel prices. Changes in food prices were not a major factor in March. Montana employment grew by 1,900 jobs between February and March to 441,700. This represented a change of 0.43%. Total U.S. non-farm employment grew by 180,000 over the month, which was equal to a change of 0.13%.